NEW ALMADEN

OR

A CALIFORNIA MINING CAMP

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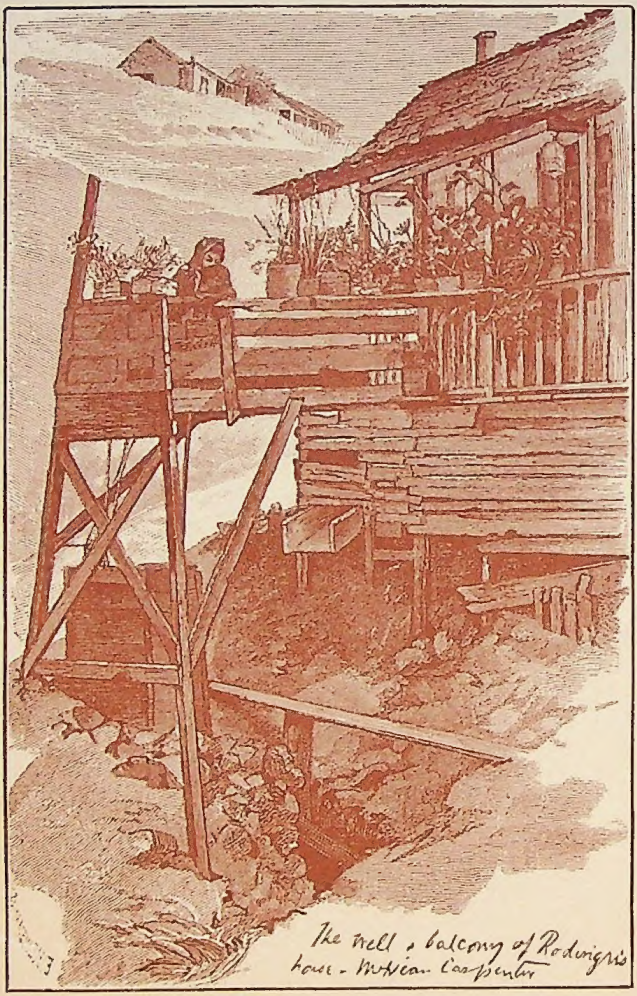

Life in 1877
at New Almaden
as Pictured
in Word and
Illustration by
Mary Hallock Foote

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February 1878

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Introduction

In 1953 my late husband and I had the pleasure of visiting Mr. and Mrs. Arthur B. Foote, son and daughter-in-law of Mary Ann Hallock Foote, in Grass Valley. They gave us a deeper appreciation of the character of the small, blond, pink cheeked illustrator-author of this article. They also emphasized that she should not be confused with Henry Wagner Halleck, who was prominent in the early developement of the New Almaden Mine.

Being a timid, sensitive person, Mary Ann Hallock could feel the beauty of nature, as well as people and their emotions; had learned in her youth to portray these feelings with pen and pencil, becoming one of the finest illustrators of her day. These abilities enabled people of the East to better understand not only the rawness of the mining camps, but the everyday life experienced there.

In 1876, after her marriage to Arthur De Wint Foote, she came West to New Almaden, where her husband was to be the mining engineer. This was her first long distance journey of over 100 miles from her home in Milton, New York.

Although they lived in Cornish Camp on 'Mine Hill' for only one year, it was to influence her for the rest of her life – a very active 91 years. As she found the West and its fascinating material "too absorbing for her pen and pencil" she started writing as well as illustrating.

Her first article (about New Almaden, which is reprinted here) and the subsequent fifteen books, allows one to relive the atmosphere of the 1870's to 1900's. Strange as it may seem, the bound volumes were not profusely illustrated as were the articles published by Scribner's and Curtis Magazines.

This article, written as she lived it, gives a realistic picture, not one written in retrospect, allowing the reader to feel the community life of sharing with one's fellow man, irregardless of race, color, or creed.

It is the pleasure of the New Almaden Museum to present Mary Ann Hallock Foote's "A California Mining Camp", first published in Scribner's Magazine of February, 1878.

Constance B. Perham, Curator
New Almaden Museum

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A CALIFORNIA MINING CAMP.

I OFTEN think, as I stoop to pick a cluster of white-petaled flowers, that seem the very expression of the freshness and briefness of the morning, how, in some shadowy "labór" a thousand feet below, a gang of Mexicans, finishing their night-shift, may be passing the "barrilito" from one grimy mouth to another.

If one possessed an ear-trumpet like Dame Eleanor Spearing's, by laying it on almost any spot of these steeply mounting hills and winding trails, one might hear the ringing of hammer and drill against the rock, the rumbling of cars through cavernous drifts, the dull thunder of blasts, even the voices of men burrowing in the heart of the mountain. One can walk, in the passages only of this underground world, for twenty-seven miles without treading the same path twice. Only those familiar with its blind ways from childhood may venture below in safety without a guide, for besides the danger of being lost, is that of wandering into some disused "labór," where the rotten timbers threaten a "cave." Within the last year, I am told, a part of "Mine Hill" has settled three inches, and everywhere above the "old workings" great cracks and holes show how the shell is constantly sinking. If this burrowing process goes on with the same vigor as during the last thirty years, the mountain will some day be nothing but a hollow crust,—a huge nut-shell, emptied of its kernel. Acres of its surface now cover nothing but emptiness, —caverns, hundreds of feet in length and breadth, connected by winding passages hewn out of the rock, and propped by a net-work of timbers.

"Nuevo Almadén," the mine was called, under the leisurely Mexican *régime;* then the quicksilver ore was carried in leather sacks on the miners' heads, up ladders made of notched logs, and "packed" down the mountain to the furnaces, on the backs of mules. There is an old "labór" called "La Cruz," where candles were kept burning before a shrine to the Virgin, hollowed out of the rocky wall. It was furnished with a crucifix and an image of the Queen of Heaven with a crown on her head and the Holy Child in her arms. Here the miners knelt in prayer before going to their day's or night's work. No one ever passed it without making the sign of the cross. The mule-trains, the Mexican ladders, the shrine and crucifix disappeared when the Baron family lost their claim and "Nuevo" became New Almaden. That prompt and urgent monosyllable was the key-note to the change of dynasty. What the mine may have lost in picturesqueness, it has gained, however, in general interest, from the curious mixture of races gathered here, all living under a common rule, with the same work and the same general influences, yet as distinctly national as if each occupied its own corner of the earth.

It gives me a strange feeling to see the miners go down into the underworld. The men's heads show above the top of the "skip," the bell strikes, the engineer moves a lever, the great wheels of the engine slowly swing round and the heads disappear down the black hole. I can see a hand waved and the glimmer of a candle for a little way. The spark grows fainter and a warm, damp wind blows up the shaft.

Above-ground, the colony is in three stories: the Hacienda* at the foot of the mountain, the Cornish camp half-way up, and the Mexican camp on top; a long winding road leads from one to another, like a staircase. From its breezy landings, looking back, one can follow the Santa Clara valley, opening out to the sea, and the long quiet lines of the Coast Range opposite, while the nearer mountains fold in around with strong lights and shadows. The mountains are not bare, but clothed chiefly with scrub-oak and live-oak, not large, yet sufficient to soften the rugged outlines. The "works" are hidden by spurs and clefts, so as to be quite inconspicuous. The shaft-houses and miners' cottages on the sides of the hills are of no more consequence than rabbit-holes.

The charms of the Hacienda are of the obvious kind: a long, shady street, following the bright ripples of a stream (which the tourist generally speaks of as the "Arroyo de los Alamitos"), at one end the manager's house, with its double piazzas

* "Hacienda," as used at Almaden, describes the village where the manager lives and has his office, and where the furnaces are built for reducing the ore. When the mine was under Mexican management it was much less extended, there was no Cornish camp and the settlement was chiefly at the Hacienda.

and easy hospitable breadth of front, a lonely background of mountains at the other, and the vine-covered cottages between. These agreeable objects can be as well appreciated in a drive along the main street as in a year's residence there,—it is very pretty; but as the "show" village of the mine, ever conscious of the manager's presence, the Hacienda wears an air of propriety and best behavior, fatal to its picturesqueness.

There is no undue propriety about the mining camps on the "Hill." Their domestic life has the most unrestrained frankness of expression, and their charms are certainly not obtrusive. The Mexicans have the gift of harmoniousness; they seem always to fit their surroundings, and their dingy little camp has made itself at home on the barren hills, over which it is scattered; but the charm of the Cornish camp lies partly in the vivid incongruity between its small, clamorous activities, and the repose of the vast, silent nature around it.

As you climb the last hill before reaching the Cornish camp, a live-oak tree, warped by the wind, leans out in relief against the sky at a sharp bend of the road. It bears upon its trunk certain excrescences in the shape of oblong boxes, inscribed (in various experimental styles of chirography) with the names of dwellers remote from the high-road. Many trees in the camp, standing at the meeting of ways, bear these excrescences. To a New England mind they would at once suggest the daily paper; but the Cornish miners sustain life on something more substantial than "bread and the newspaper." The meat-wagon, on its morning rounds, leaves Tyrrell his leg-o'-mutton, Tregoning his soup-bone, and Trengove his two-bits' worth of steak, in the boxes bearing these names respectively. Harold, in Tennyson's drama, boasts that, in his earldom,

> "A man may hang gold bracelets on a bush,
> And leave them for a year, and coming back,
> Find them again,"

and such is the honesty of the Cornish camp, that trees bearing soup-bones, steaks, and legs-of-mutton, are never plucked of their fruit, save by the rightful owners.

The camp seems always to be either washing or moving, or both. Monday and Mayday arrive here quite regardless of the almanac or the customs of society. The Cornish miner can hardly be said to

> fold his tent like the Arab,
> And silently steal away.

When the wind sits in the shoulder of his sail, the entire camp is aware of the fact. There is an auction of his household gear, at which his neighbors are cheerfully emulous that some private good should result from the loss to the community. He departs with his wife and quiverful of chil-

CORNISHMAN "TRAMMING" AT BUSH TUNNEL.

"PACKING" WATER FROM BUSH TUNNEL.

dren, and the house that knew him knows him no more. Another assortment of family garments flaps on the clothes-lines; another brood of chickens and children throngs his door-step.

During the long months when drought sits heavy on the land, the water-tank is one of the idyls of the Cornish Camp. It is a sort of club at which congregate all the stray dogs, donkeys, sad-eyed cows (who subsist, at this season, chiefly on hope deferred), boys with water-pails, red-shirted teamsters, and "wood-packers" with trains of jaded mules; there is nothing dubious in the nature of its benefits, and of all who gather there none depart in bitterness, unless it may be the small Cornish lads, who carry away two heavy pails and a sense of injury natural to the spirit of youth under such circumstances. Three times a day the motley crowd gathers, but I like it best at sunset, with a flushed sky overhead, against which the figures are dark; gleams of trickling water; the straw hat of a teamster, or a gaunt gray donkey, catching the waning light; while evening shadows brood already in the hollows of the mountains and deepen the mystery of the cañon beyond.

Past the store and the water-tank the road winds still upward, and passes out of sight round a spur of the mountain. It leads to the Mexican camp and into an entirely different social atmosphere. The village lies all in broadest sunlight, unrelieved by tree or shelter of any kind except here and there the shadow of a rock in which, perhaps, stands a donkey, with drooping ears and hanging lip, motionless in a patient reverie.

The Mexican camp has little of that bustling energy which belongs to its neighbor on the floor below. It wakes up slowly in the morning,—especially if the morning be cold,—and lounges abroad on moonlight nights, when guitar-tinklings sound from the shadowy vine-flecked porches. The barest little cabin has its porch, its climbing vines and shelf of carefully tended plants. Dark-eyed women sit on the door-steps in the sun braiding a child's hair, perhaps, or chattering to a neighbor, who leans against the door-post with a baby half hidden in the folds of her shawl. They walk up and down the hilly street, letting their gowns trail in the dust, their heads enveloped in a shawl, one end of which is turned up over the shoulder; the smooth, sliding step corresponds with the accent in speaking. In passing, they look at you with a slow, grave stare like that of a child. All, even to the babies, have an air of repose; crudeness of voice or manner is almost unknown among them.

The first time I went down into the mine one of the men of the party, as is the custom, passed a bottle of whisky among the men in each "labór" we visited. The Cornish men drank in a hearty, unconstrained fashion enough, but each Mexican, before raising the bottle to his lips, turned to the two women of the party with a grave inclination and a *Buena salud, Señoras!*

In practical dealings with them one is constantly baffled by the softly spoken phrase, "No possible, Señora!" There is one, Vesequio,—a dark, short, fat-visaged

person, not without guile, I fear, who gives lessons on the guitar,* attends all the miners' auctions, and keeps for sale, in his dingy little shop, a curious collection of furniture, new and old. In a moment of weakness we bought a chair of Vesequio. It had certain merits (cheapness, probably, was one of them) which induced us to overlook the fact of its being slightly out of repair. Vesequio promised to mend it—the work of an hour or two—and bring it the next day. It did not come, of course—he hadn't the tools; he would send it the very next day to his neighbor the carpentero; then the carpentero went to town,—when he returned it should be mended at once. After I had given up all hope of ever seeing it in the house, Vesequio came down the trail one day, dressed in his best clothes, followed by his man Friday, a blear-eyed, idiotic-looking Mexican, whose life is, I fear, anything but an upward striving of the spirit. Man Friday carried the chair; Vesequio thus had both hands free to assist him in a series of graceful salutations as Lizzie ushered him into the room. If I had been equal to the part of Imperial Highness it would have greatly resembled the introduction of an embassador bearing gifts from one potentate to another. If you could have seen the gesture with which Vesequio spread out both hands—and if you could have seen the hands!

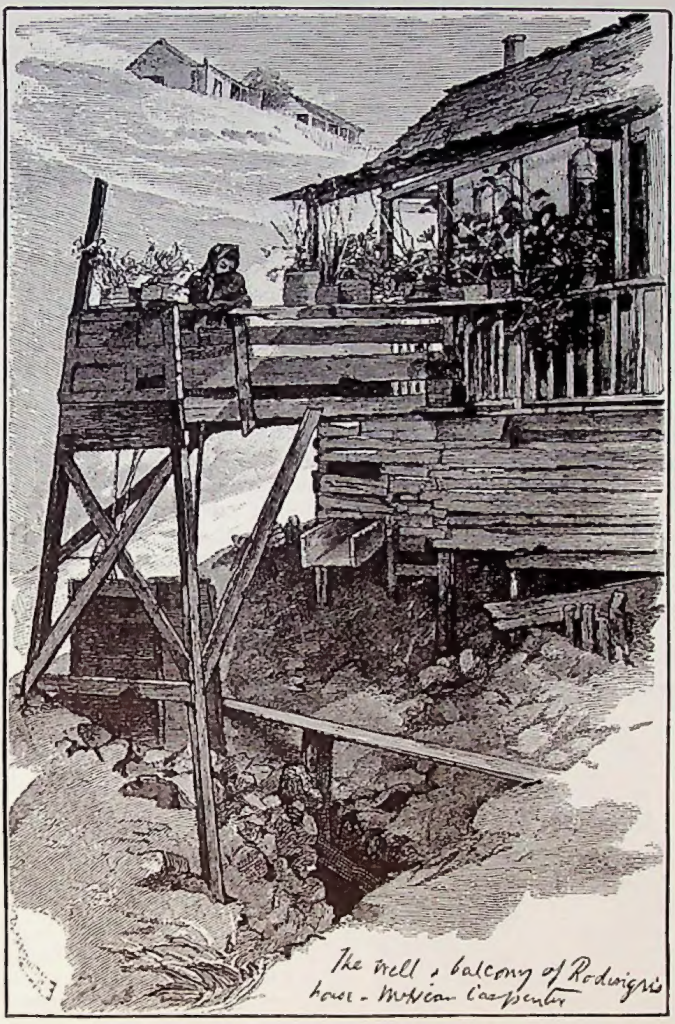
We found at Vesequio's an old brown jar, broken slightly on the lip, but such a delightful old heathen! He looks as if he had crawled out of a tomb ages old. The color is dull reddish-brown, it is big and clumsy in shape, and looks as if it held old secrets of the flesh. We asked Vesequio if he could get us any smaller ones. His face took a sudden gleam of half-concealed and crafty satisfaction, and he said softly, as if to himself, "Possible!" but both Vesequio and we were disappointed. Not another could be found in the camp. It would have been great fun, the bargain with Vesequio. He saw we were anxious to have it, and how he would have enjoyed the elaborate details of the final settlement. I don't care how long the bargaining lasts. It is so amusing to follow the inflections of Vesequio's fat voice,

* He plays (on some instrument—I don't know what) during service at the Catholic Chapel. On Christmas eve, at the midnight mass, they played, just at 12 o'clock, "Put me in my little bed." The Mexicans did not understand the meaning of the words very clearly, or else mistook their association.

THE "PANADERO," DELIVERING BREAD.

the action of his hands, and the play of his toad-like features.

I began an acquaintance with Vesequio's pretty little daughter, Theophila. The first



time I saw that brown-cheeked little maiden she was standing on a ladder watering her plants. They were ranged on a kind of scaffolding, like a rude balcony, across one end of the house, and the ladder was leaned against it. I remember some hollyhocks, white, pink and yellow, lifting their spires of blossoms in the sunlight, with the gray boards behind them. She wore a brown petticoat and a short white sack, somewhat crumpled, as if—I hope Theophila will pardon the suspicion—she might have slept in it. They were very drowsy-looking wrinkles, and the dark locks hanging down her back had certainly not been braided that morning. I saw her cheek, half turned away, the red flush showing under the brown, her drooped eyelashes, and the frizz of dark hair above her forehead; one slender brown hand was lifted with the water-pitcher. There was a hint of positive red somewhere about her; it might have been a glimpse of her stockings or a bit of ribbon hanging from that rough braid. She was perfect! I cannot believe

MEXICAN CABINS, NEAR DAY TUNNEL.

Theophila will ever be like the curiously wrinkled or fat and shapeless señoras I have seen standing in their door-ways, one hand propping the arm which raises a cigarette to the lips while they gaze languidly down the sunny street.

One sees very few old people among the Mexicans; they are a feeble race, and seldom last into the seventies; but when you do meet one who has shuffled into that "last scene of all," he takes the part so

OLD MEXICAN WOMAN.

well, you feel that you have never seen an old man before.

Climbing the steepest part of the main street of the Mexican camp, I met one morning a procession of two—a small, swarthy boy, and a donkey with a very big head. I don't know whether a donkey's obstinacy increases with the size of his head, but the small boy's figure slanted at a sharp angle with the hill,—he was as far in advance of the donkey as the length of his rope would permit, and the rope was very "taut." The donkey carried on his back a kind of wooden frame, used to hold water-buckets, one suspended on each side, but loaded instead with pots of blossoming plants,—flaming scarlet geraniums, a tall calla-lily, and a thorny monster of a cactus, beloved by the Mexicans. As the donkey sulkily planted one foot before another, all this gay company nodded and shook in the sunlight, and seemed to wave greetings to their stay-at-home neighbors in the road-side porches.

On our walk we once met some bare-legged, bare-headed Mexican lads racing their donkeys over the hills, looking themselves like wild young colts of a dark and stubbed breed. One of them—such is the happy instinct of these people—wore a pink cotton shirt; had the tone of the surrounding landscape required it, his shirt would have been flaming yellow.

One day Mr. H. brought the beauty of the Mexican camp to call. Her name is Aurelia Sambroña; she has lovely dark eyes and a soft voice; but I was disappointed that she did not wear the dark shawl draped round her head and shoulders as they are worn on ordinary days at the camp. Our Mexican water-cooler has

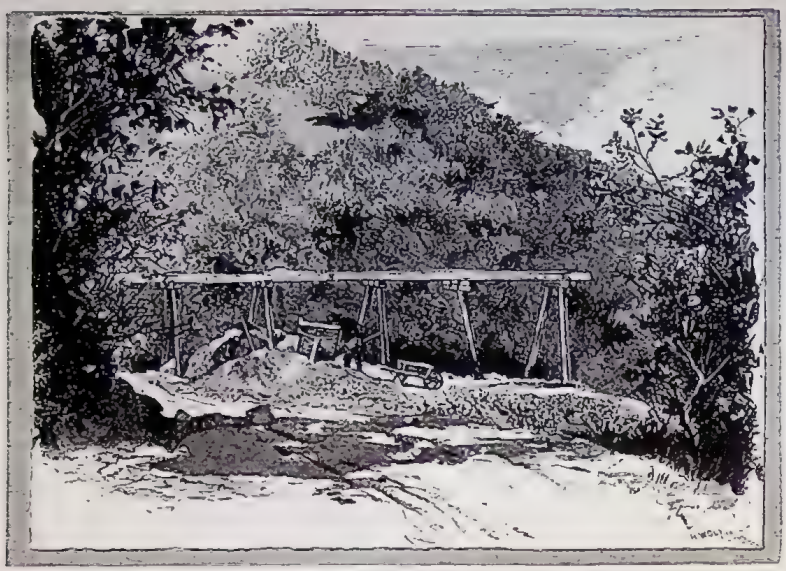
an inscription of which I asked for the meaning. Aurelia smiled and said: "Help thyself, little Tomasa!" The maker of the jar had pictured to himself some brown-cheeked maiden lifting it to her lips.

After this we went up to the Mexican camp to return Miss Aurelia's call. She lives with her married sister; they keep a quiet kind of restaurant. Mr. H. said our call would be regarded as a great condescension, but I confess that when the two graceful, dark-eyed women came in to receive us, their soft voices and movements, and a kind of slow, gentle self-possession, made me feel my own manner crude and angular by comparison. Mr. H. talked for us all, and they looked from us to him, whenever we spoke, with a pretty appealing smile. They offered us the native wine, and the most delicious dried figs,—not withered and pressed, but dark plump lumps of sweetness clinging together.

A ball was given by the Mexicans upon the anniversary of their independence. We went up to see the dancing, which was very beautiful. The Mexican girls have exquisite forms, especially when in motion; their dancing was like inspiration. There were people of every nationality—stout, blonde Cornish youths side by side with slim, swarthy Mexicans. There were Ignatio Enestrajo, a "Chiliano," and the sisters of Castro (the silversmith), half Mexican, half Chinese. A young Spaniard delivered the "oration." I saw the son of the German foreman at the Hacienda dancing with the daughter of the French butcher. The music was very good for the purpose,—a violoncello, two violins, one brass piece, and a flute. They played the Mexican national hymn to open the ball, and much of the "dance music" had pretty Mexican or Spanish names. The refreshments were whisky, ale, Port wine sangeree, lemonade made of some kind of acid, crackers, cheese, candy and nuts. The next day (Sunday) we met a number of the dancers returning home after a few hours sleep. Many of them walked all the way from Guadaloupe.

My last visit to the Mexican camp was during the yellow hazy July weather; it was after a fire had swept away all the houses lying below and around the rock, which rises like a fortress at the north-west end of the camp. The bare sun-baked rock stood out, with all its reddish-yellow lights and purple-brown shadows, in strong relief against the solid blue of the sky. Down its sides were the blackened lines of brick which marked the foundations of the ruined houses. Below, was the little street silent and deserted, with its quiet afternoon shadows stretching across it. It seemed old enough for anything. It might have been a little Pompeiian street lying so still in the broad sunlight, under that intensely blue-bright sky. I sat under the shadow of a Mexican cabin on the high bank overlooking the street. A little girl named Amelia, too slight and small to carry the child she held wrapped in an old shawl, stood beside me and told me the Spanish

A GIRL OF THE MEXICAN CAMP.



DUMP OF THE GREAT EASTERN TUNNEL.

words for rock, and sky, and picture, and the names of her brothers and sisters. The mother, leaning on the railing of the rough balcony above, smiled down at me and counted them on her fingers—six in all—and then crossed both hands on her breast with a proud and gentle gesture of triumph in the possession of the six. The cheerfulness of the whole family,—brown, ragged, ill-fed, sickly and numerous as they were,—a cheerfulness which implied no hope or even understanding of anything better, was the saddest thing in the whole of that warm, sunny desolation.

Early morning at New Almaden is worth getting up betimes to see. Sometimes the valley is like a great lake filled with billows of fog,—pearly white billows, tumbling and surging with noiseless motion. It is more as if the clouds had all fallen out of the sky, leaving its blue intensity unbroken, and heaping the valley with fleecy whiteness. On windy mornings, the fog rolls grandly out to sea along the defiles of the triple chain of hills; when there is no wind, it rises and drifts in masses over the mountains, making the clear sunlight hazy for a moment before dissolving into it. After the rains, when the morning air has a frosty crispness, the mountains are outlined in sharp, dark blue against a sky of reddish-gold; even the tops of the distant red-woods may be traced, "bristling strange, in fiery light," along the horizon. As the sun lifts its head, the dark blue hills flush purple, long shadows stream across the valley, the windows and spires of San José sparkle into sight, and the bay reveals itself, a streak of silver in the far distance. There is no chorus of birds to break the stillness.

The first morning sounds I remember noticing as peculiar to the place came up to us from a camp of Chinamen, happily out of sight, below the hill,—a cackling of discordant voices and a brazen beating and drumming which was explained to me as the Chinese cook's signal for breakfast, beating on a frying-pan. Half an hour later came the long ringing call of the seven o'clock whistle from the nearest shaft-house. Still later, a rustling and tinkling among the live-oak boughs, which screen the trail, announced the panadero from the Mexican camp. His gray mule pushed her way out from the scrub, with the great bread-baskets swinging, one on either side, their canvas covers damp with dew. The panadero sat in front serenely smoking a cigarette; a little bell tinkled at the mule's bridle. I was half sorry when we became a well-regulated household with bread of our own baking, for then no panadero stopped at the gate on the foggy mornings, and went swaying and tinkling up the trail.

I was not encouraged to investigate that camp of Chinamen below the hill, but once we went to "China Sam's" to buy a lantern. Like "Taffy," he wasn't "home" (there is another respect in which most

Chinamen are said to resemble "Taffy"), but his wife was. She seemed not more than fourteen years old—a mere child with the smallest hands. She carried a baby slung at her back in the folds of a dark-red silk scarf, which was crossed over her breast. The baby had a tiny black cap worked with embroidery on its head,—a chubby little thing, fast asleep, swaying from side to side as the small mother trotted about. She examined my dress, hands and ornaments, and, pointing to her baby, put her fingers on her under teeth and held up two fingers to tell me it had two teeth. Whenever I tried to say anything to her she laughed and said, "No sabe." She was very delicately formed, her hands small as a child's, and perfect in shape, yet when she took one of mine to look at a ring which had caught her eye, I felt uncomfortable at the touch of those slim, tawny fingers. She offered a cigar to my companion, which he accepted and held carefully, but as we left the house, I noticed that he tossed it into the bushes.

In an inner closet where the day was shut out, we saw the glimmer of candle-light on some brilliantly colored papers on the wall. This was the family altar.

Several years ago Sam was head cook at the boarding-house on the "Hill." Another Chinaman tried to get his place by underhand means. Sam carefully noted his movements; there was a journey to San José, which ended badly for the other Chinaman, and not too well for Sam, as he was tried soon after for murder. He spent a few months in jail, but he had only killed another Chinaman, and he was an excellent cook,—probably a much better one than his rival,—so he was finally acquitted. Two or three years ago he sent to China for his wife; she excused herself from coming on the plea of being too old for so long a journey, and sent this young girl instead. Sam says his young wife is "heap fool! Allee time play chile [with the child]!" and he beats the "chile" because it is a girl.

Toward the close of the dry season, when brown and dusty August burns into browner, dustier September, a keen remembrance of all cool, watery joys takes possession of one's thoughts. The lapping of ripples in pebbly coves, the steady thump of oars in row-locks, the smell of apple blossoms on damp spring evenings, old mill-races mossy and dripping, the bleating of frightened lambs at a sheep-washing and the hoarse, stifled complaint of their mothers mingled with the rushing of the stream,

A CHINAMAN "PACKING" BRUSH.

MEXICAN CAMP—AFTER THE FIRE.

—all these once common sounds and sights haunt the memory. Every day the dust-cloud grows thicker in the valley, the mountains fade almost out of sight against a sky which is all glare without color; a dry wind searches over the bare, brown hills for any lingering drop of moisture the sun may have left there; but morning and evening still keep a spell which makes one forget the burden of the day. At sunset the dust-cloud in the valley becomes a bar of color stretching across the base of the mountains, deep rose and orange, shading by softest gradations into cool blue. I remember one sunset especially. The clouds of dust rolling up from the valley below were transformed by the light into level bars of color like a horizontal rainbow sweeping across the entire valley; above it the mountains rose; a wonderful variety of constantly changing hues made them look like something unreal. Then there came a sudden darkening of the lower part of the mountains so that the sun-lit peaks seemed to float in the air above the bars of sun-colored dust, with a strip of cool shadow between. All is quiet; as in the morning, no birds chirp and twitter themselves to sleep; the stillness is only broken by the dull throbbing of the engine like a stifled breath in the distant shaft-house.

MEXICAN POTTERY.

Every evening repeats this silent symphony of color, and every day it seems like something one has dreamed of. The rose and orange and blue have faded into the same dull, gray pall, which, to the valley stretched beneath, is never anything more; only those who see it from the hills know that sometimes this pall is a robe of glory.

We rode home one evening across the low, bare hills beyond the Mexican camp. It was during the "earth-shock weather" (as the miners call those last, dry, lurid weeks before the early rain-fall), and one of the dull, red sunsets, peculiar to that season, had been flaming on the sky and mountains; its lingering glow colored the edge of the early moonlight. The soil here

has a vermilion tinge, which is stronger after sundown; it was intensified that evening by the flush in the sky. There was no positive light or shadow, only a pink glow spreading over all the wide landscape, except where the cañon held its glooms, and above it a young moon slowly brightened in a sky of twilight blue. It was in sentiment like William Morris's poetry. I always think of it as the "land east of the sun, and west of the moon." While the moon is young and her light faint and pale, one can scarcely mark the time when the lingering twilight passes into the soft, dim radiance that spreads like a spell over the valley, across part of which lies the shadow of a mountain. We cannot see the moon itself, only its light. The mountains opposite remain always shrouded in silence and mystery. But when nights come for the full moon the place is a paradise: in the foreground the winding trails with black masses of shadow from the clumps of live-oak crossing them, the dark mountain lines rising grandly on every side, the mysterious depths of the cañons, the lights of the Mexican camp scattered over the hills, the closer clustered lights of the Cornish camp on the lower range, the wide, dim valley below, and the far-off barrier of mountains.

WOOD-PACKERS.

At this season every one is storing up wood in anticipation of the winter rains. Every day a train of loaded mules winds over the hills from the "wood-packers'" camp in the cañon. They are fine at a distance, but I did not fully appreciate them until a troop came down the trail one morning, in charge of an old Mexican, and stopped at our gate. I could then study the delightful intricacy of their pack-saddles, the clumsy leather breeching, the cruel "cincho," the knots and ends and lacings of leather string, the bits of colored cloth escaping from the padding, and the different phase of depression each mule exhibited under its burden.

The wood is fastened with ropes in two great bundles, one on either side, giving the mule from front or rear, the appearance of an animated wood-pile. Three hundred pounds makes a load or "carga." Two Mexicans came with the mules, drove them into the yard and unloaded the wood. I felt glad to see the weary burden fall from those "galled jades." I was on the piazza watching them; when I asked the elder of the men how much to pay for the wood, he told me in broken English; and as he was below,—the piazza on that side being high above the yard,—he unrolled a red silk handkerchief from his neck, made it into a ball and tossed it up. The maid came out and rolled the money up in it and tossed it down. He was an old man with a face the color of chocolate and with shaggy gray hair. He smiled and looked like something inhuman in his gaunt old age.

A Mexican brought our wood—of course a Chinaman chopped it. The first one who came was, it seems, not equal to the emergency; I heard some one shouting to him from the window in a language which struck me as a kind of profane and hardened baby-talk:

"You heap no good, John. What for you no catchum saw?—me no have got—You go catchum saw. Come back to-mollow!"

"Allee light!" John said, and departed with a smiling face. Next morning another came who had succeeded in catching a saw.

It is very interesting to see the Mexican boys, "Muchachos," and their donkeys congregated around the store at six in the morning, or climbing the trail. Often two little fellows will ride one donkey with a bag of flour in front. The donkeys are used to "pack" water to the Mexican camp. You see them every morning and evening patiently climbing or descending the trail with buckets of water on each side. A procession of half a dozen will be driven by a man or boy mounted on one behind. The donkeys and mules in their picturesque trappings are in fact the great feature of the place. The wood-packers and water-carriers are as fine as anything in the Orient.

THE WATER-CARRIER OF THE MEXICAN CAMP.

There is a little spring by the road-side—merely a barrel sunk in the ground; overhead is a shaggy bank with gray roots projecting in light, deep shadows falling over the water. Above is the mountain-side, below the wide outlook across the valley to the coast range opposite. Here I saw one afternoon an old donkey, standing perfectly motionless looking into the pool. He was unsaddled, but his back showed the galled places his burdens had made. His ears and under-lip drooped. There were a few dead leaves dropping down from the sycamore-trees, although, for a wonder, the afternoon was very still. A red sunset was burning itself out on the mountains and the valley was filled with ashen shadows. I cannot tell how dreary it was, and yet with a half humorous tone in the recollection, I thought of the line:

"Drink, weary pilgrim, drink and pray."

When summer passes into winter a new phase of the climate is experienced. Morning and evening we are wrapped in fog that blows in wildly from the sea, fills the valley and rises until we are muffled in its chill whiteness. Going out for a walk after breakfast, I seem to be the only person in the whole world. It is impossible to describe the curious feeling it gives one to walk in this veiled landscape. I pass along the edge of steep ravines and know that on ahead, where the road goes out of sight around a bend of the mountain, lies a great stretch of valley and mountain, but it is all a blank white wall everywhere. It is always very still here (except just in the camps where children are playing in the streets) and the fog seems to deaden what little sound there usually is. The silence then is complete.

What strange Christmas weather at New

Almaden—wild and bright but soft as windy days in April! The heavy rains began late, and the greenness which came with the first fall rains faded for want of encouragement. The valley was touched by frost, and this blight, added to the drought, made it look as if a flame had passed over it. We had only a few pale wreaths of fog those clear, windy mornings and they floated low, leaving the mountain line dark and sharply outlined against the most solemn radiant morning sky. The redwoods on a distant range of hills stood out like spears or furled flags of a marching army. There is always a distinctly masculine character in this scenery; the mountains are ominous, and even when all alight with color they seem to be in the shadow of some impending doom. No matter how the wind may blow here, or the people clatter and cackle in their little houses, the light on the mountains is always still, as if they were part of another world.

In Christmas-week I sat on the piazza with broad sun-hat and a gown I wear in June. Stillness and sunshine rested everywhere. The valley was filled with haze. The mountains had withdrawn themselves into fainter outlines against the sky. Columns of smoke from burning stubble-fields rose and floated away over the valley. On Christmas-day I took a long walk, climbed the bare hill behind the Mexican camp, where there are some lonely graves in stark relief against the broad, blue, smiling expanse of sky. The skies here, except at sunrise and sunset, are very unsympathetic. From this hill, which is up in the very eye of the sun, without a tree or rock to break with a single shadow its broad, pitiless glare, we can look over all the mountains round and into the glooms of the deep cañon beyond the camp. I remember once seeing a sketch in a few lines of a knight, standing alone on a hill with rays of the sun around him, as if he were the only man on the round earth. I thought of this picture as I stood here. But as I turned away from the broad light in which the whole country lay in a sort of trance, there were the lonely graves, each with its wooden cross slanted by the wind, and its rude fence to keep stray donkeys and cows from trampling what lay within. I tried to read the Spanish inscriptions, but could only make out the names and the formula which all creeds and races cling to: "Here rests in peace."* Each grave had its vine or flower planted over it, and the peculiarity of some of them suggested a reference to some wish of the one resting in peace. Many of the plants were weird, tropical-looking things,—a pepper-tree or cactus, or some shrub which may have brought up remembrances of a sunnier land even than this. Everything was dazzlingly bright, the air as mild, and the stillness as deep, as in the "hollow lotus-land."

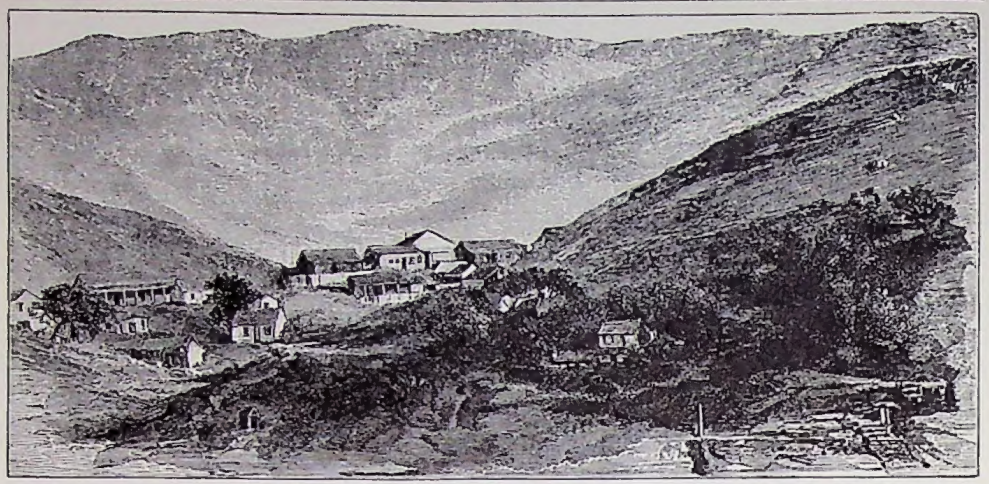
I have seldom felt the sadness of this landscape as on that morning. It is a sadness which comes from a perpetual lack of sympathy between Nature and the pitiful creatures whom she so grandly and calmly refuses to recognize as her children. The Mexicans alone seem to belong to her in a way they have of uniting themselves with their clothes, their houses, and even with the country itself. They are not self-asserting and full of personality as we are; they slip along in a listless, easy way, unfretted, unambitious, graceful,—struggling against nothing, accepting all without question.

On Christmas-eve there was a midnight mass at the "Campo del Mexicana." I did not know of it till too late, or I would have gone. On Christmas evening I was left alone for a while. It was a little dreary, especially after the wind rose and began making noises round the house. As I sat thus over the fire, there were steps and voices outside, then a stillness,—and then a chorus of children's voices burst out with a Christmas hymn!

According to custom, the singers were invited in. They made a very striking group. The children crowded round a small table in the center of the room, where two candles threw a strong light up into the circle of rosy young faces and bright eyes,—the young men, with their stalwart figures and voices, making a contrast to the sweet youthful choir. Two of the elder girls helped me pass among the guests an elaborately frosted cake which had been given us (the workmanship of Chinese Sam's subtle fingers), and then, after another song, they went away, leaving me in a sort of bewilderment as to whether it were not all imagination.

The spring at New Almaden is most bewildering! One week the rain and wind keep up a tumult round the house; the next we are flooded with sunshine; flowers are

* Often those who die at New Almaden are buried at the Company's expense or by the charity of the neighbors. Many of the graves are those of strangers,—only a short time at the mine,—their friends unknown or out of reach.



THE MEXICAN CAMP (WEST END) AND THE HILL OF GRAVES.

springing up everywhere; the grass is like a miracle, growing out of places that looked as if they had been sowed with salt. I go every afternoon over the hills in search of wild flowers, and in the morning, before the dew is dried, after mushrooms. They grow in great profusion, if one can use such a flowery word in reference to the modest little pink and drab buttons that hide in the sod. Buttercups here grow double and are no prettier on that account. There is a delicate white-and-pink four-petaled flower with a faint perfume and a long drooping stem—it reminds me of our eastern anemone; and one day I found growing in the clefts of a mossy pile of rock a mass of fresh young maiden-hair ferns. I put my face down close among them to smell that delicious pungent, growthy smell, mixed with the moist, wholesome breath of the ground.

The long, hot, dry "winter of our discontent" has passed, and this is the "glorious summer." Morning-glories were planted around the piazza, and at the root of an old half dead live-oak tree at the foot of the yard. There were clumps of purple iris growing near the house. As the season moved on we had violets, wild roses, clematis, blackberry-vines, in profusion. I did not care so much for the great scarlet geranium bushes, though it is very ungrateful. They stood by us bravely all through the dry season, blooming continually. Their red flames seemed to defy the sunshine and would not be put out.

We call our piazza the "quarter-deck," and with its wide outlook and the strong wind that always blows there, I often feel as if we were at sea. From here I can see the trail which winds steeply up the hill behind the house and disappears in a dark clump of live-oak trees; opposite is a bold spur of the mountains round which winds the road from the Hacienda. At sunset I can see the stage-coach crawling up with its black leather curtains flapping in the wind, horses and driver covered with dust. It is the bearer of letters, and therefore the only visible link with the world beyond the mountains. These mountains are beginning to have a human expression as I watch them day after day; they are stern, brooding giants. They make a barrier along the horizon like the tents or fortifications of an immense army, and seem to hold us prisoners. Last night they were wonderful in the pink sunset light; but they always give me the same feeling, whether dark with cloud-shadows or gorgeous in sunlight, the sense of a silent irresistible fate—waiting there, patient, unpitying, eternal.

We see the lights of distant camp-fires burning after dark on the side of the first mountain range across the valley. Every night as twilight closes, we behold them shining always in the same place. I used to wonder what lonely men they might be, and if they could see our light—one little spark, faint and uncertain like theirs, but human. Now I am told that they are sheep-herders' camps. I asked how many men were together? "Generally," said my friend, "one man alone." He had met them on the Sierras and found them the most utterly discouraged men he had ever seen,—men who had been unsuccessful in all other ways. Now when I look at those fires they seem like signals of distress.